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MILLY LANCE





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MILLY LANCE





MILLY LANCE

By DUTTON COOK



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MILLY LANCE

Dr. Dendy was not good-looking. He might even have been called ugly, but that there is an excellent precept impressed on all well-cared-for minds in their nursery stage of formation, to the effect that no one may be so offensively described, except it be a certain notorious personage whom it will not be necessary to name. Let us say therefore, that Dr. Dendy was plain.

He was a physician in large practice. Jocose people said of him that, in the course of his professional career he had had occasion to thrust so many guineas into his pockets that eventually the gold coin, carried so much about his person, had got into his own circulation, and affected the colour of his skin. Certainly his complexion was deeply tinged with yellow. He was very bald,

with a narrow festoon of iron-gray hair at the back of his head. His small, neat, wiry figure was always clothed in black—his coat being invariably buttoned tightly across his chest. He was of middle age, perhaps a little better; which expression, as applied to age, is generally understood to signify a little worse, or older. He lived in a grand, gaunt, murky house in Harley Street, seldom setting foot in more than two rooms in it, however—his library and his bedroom. He was the author of an admired Treatise on the Pathology of the Heart, to which work he was constantly adding annotations and commentaries, with a view to completely exhausting and settling the subject. When he was able to devote a little more time to it, his book, he was satisfied, would be the only authority on the heart—physiologically and pathologically considered.

But his time was very much occupied. He saw patients at his own house almost before he had swallowed his breakfast; later in the day, he saw other patients at their own homes; he was one of the physicians to St. Lazarus Hospital, and gave lectures on *Materia Medica*, course after course,

to the students of that excellent institution; he was a Fellow, or a Member, of all sorts of scientific societies, and on certain days in the week he attended the boards of various Assurance companies, examined papers, and passed or rejected lives proposed for insurance. He was hard-working and prosperous. Few men in the profession, it was said, made so large an income. Go to what part of the town you would, you seemed to be forever encountering Dr. Dendy's two-horse carriage rattling along at a great pace, going to or from patients and the accompanying golden fees.

When the doctor started in the morning, he gave his coachman a list of the places he was to drive to. In this list the coachman had known entered now for some months a certain house in Calthorpe Street. You called it Calthorpe Street, Russell Square, if you were desirous of consulting the predilections of its inhabitants; if you were heedless in that respect, you spoke of it with perhaps greater accuracy as Calthorpe Street, Gray's Inn Road. Dr. Dendy always appeared to prefer the first-mentioned designation.

The coachman treated himself to a furtive smile

whenever he read Calthorpe Street in his list. The doctor had a patient there, of course. But then, as the coachman noted, his master went there oftener and stayed there longer than anywhere else. Of course the patient might be in a more deplorable state, might stand more in need of protracted visits from a medical adviser than any other of Dr. Dendy's patients; but the coachman was inclined to think that such was not the case.

On the first floor of the house in Calthorpe Street visited by Dr. Dendy, there lodged one Captain Lance, a retired Indian officer, and his only child, Miss Milly Lance. Captain Lance was in feeble health from a distressing asthma, and from other infirmities of a painful nature. He did not bear his sufferings patiently; was, indeed, very peevish and petulant and hard to please; exhibited all the selfishness and want of consideration which a long course of ill-health is apt to develop in almost any one, however great may have been his original stock of equanimity and good-nature. But Captain Lance had not begun with much excellence of temper; and now, a con-

firmed invalid, it may be said of him that he had no temper at all, except of the very worst sort. He was attended, however, with a ceaseless solicitude, an untiring affection, by his daughter Milly, a slim, fair girl of eighteen or so, not very remarkable-looking, beyond that she possessed a profusion of glossy brown hair, and a pair of large, luminous, dove-like eyes.

No wonder she was pale. She was always by the side or within call of her invalid father. She was hardly ever permitted to stir from his sick room. It was dull, tiring work. "Don't go, Milly," he would say, sharply; "I may want you; there's no knowing." She could only escape when he dozed; his asthma lulled for awhile by anodynes. Awake, he would have her ever near him, waiting on him, slaving for him, nursing him. Now and then he would upbraid her bitterly for some fancied neglect of him, the poor child with a twitching face patiently standing by him the while, replying only by her tears, her caresses, and her increased exertions for his comfort. Then he would make her the audience of his repinings, tell over and over again the story of his sufferings, bursting out

occasionally into passionate lamentations over his broken health and ruined fortunes. What could she say? What could she do? It was tiring, cruel work for poor Milly Lance.

The Captain was poor. The fact was too often harped on and groaned over for Milly not to be conscious enough of it.

Yet it must be said that Dr. Dendy had made no inroads on the sick officer's straitened means.

"No, my dear," he said to Milly, on his first visit, putting from him with a smile the proffered fee, "it musn't be. We doctors have all our crotchets. Each of us has his free list. One enters clergymen upon it; another, authors; a third, artists. For my part, I never take a fee from a soldier. I should be ashamed to do it. My father was a soldier, and served in India, as your father has served; only he was more fortunate. He was a general of division when he died. Don't let us hear any more talk about fees. It musn't be thought of for a moment."

"Oh, Dr. Dendy, how good of you! But—you'll

come and see him again?" Milly said, timidly thankful, yet alarmed. Would so great a man as the physician be content to continue labouring without his due reward?

"My dear, I shall come again and again, as often as possible, till between us we've made poor papa quite well again."

This was on the occasion of Dr. Dendy's first visit to Calthorpe Street. Milly's gratitude seemed to know no bounds. And then, thanks to Providence and the doctor's remedies, her invalid's health had certainly mended of late. He had not scolded her for nearly three days, and for about a quarter of an hour he had been almost cheerful. Indeed, she had reason to be grateful.

The doctor left Milly Lance with a fluttering sensation about his heart, such as he had taken no account, made no mention of whatever, in his famous treatise upon that organ. He returned to Calthorpe Street often. He alleged that it was very necessary for him to watch closely the effect of his prescriptions upon his patient. And each time that he saw Milly Lance—and he now felt a

curious desire to see her as frequently as possible—he experienced a return of that strange fluttering sensation in the cardiac region. He was not alarmed at it; he did not think it was disease; and if it was, he didn't care, for it was not at all disagreeable. Indeed, he liked it. Professionally, he was inclined to regard it as a new development of action—quite healthy in its nature.

For the first time he felt the chosen pursuits of his life not sufficiently attractive or absorbing. Thoughts of a new kind broke in upon his studies, disturbed his practice, interrupted the flow and harmony of his lectures. His great house seemed to him very dreary, his existence very desolate. "Who would nurse and tend me," he asked himself, "if I were to fall ill like that poor Captain Lance?" Yet he dismissed the reflections suggested by that inquiry as selfish and unworthy. "No," he said, "I couldn't wish to chain a fair young creature like that to my side only to be my nurse and my servant. If I fall ill—which Heaven forbid!—I must have a paid attendant from the hospital; that will be quite good

enough for me. It isn't for such a reason I should wish to make her mine."

For it had come to that. He wished to make Milly Lance his wife.

It was love that was so restless in his heart—playing as many pranks with him as "that shrewd and knavish sprite called Robin Goodfellow" among "maidens of the villagery," housewives and night wanderers. At least, he surmised that love was the disturbing cause of his heart's pulsing. He had had no experience of the sort of thing before; but still he thought he could hardly be mistaken. His disorder must arise from what people generally called Love.

It got to be more than he could bear at last. So he plucked up courage, and in an old-fashioned formal way he spoke to Captain Lance on the subject, and besought permission to address himself to Miss Lance. And he named a very handsome sum which he proposed to settle on his future wife—if he might regard Miss Lance in that light.

"It shall make no difference to you, captain," he said in conclusion, with an adroit consideration

for his patient's selfishness. "There's plenty of room in my house. You must pitch your tent there. You shan't be deprived of your nurse. And your medical attendant will be on the spot always. We'll soon make you your old self again."

"I congratulate you, Milly," Captain Lance said presently to his daughter, the doctor having taken his departure. "You'll accept him, of course. He's ill-looking enough, but he can't help that, and one gets accustomed to ill looks. I don't think him nearly so plain as I first thought him. And he's old; he can't help that either, and he'll the sooner make you his widow. And he's rich, Milly; very rich. Thank goodness, we shall have done with this infernal poverty! You'll accept him at once?"

"You wish it, papa?"

Her face was very white, and there was a sort of choke in her throat when she spoke.

"Of course I do," he answered sharply. "You must be a fool to ask. You don't expect such

another chance, do you? And there's no one else in the way. You don't love anyone else?"

"No," she answered faintly.

"I congratulate you. You'll be a happy woman. You'll have more money than you'll know what to do with. The luck's turned at last. Give me a glass of wine, and I'll drink your health and his."

She obeyed; then stooped to kiss him, by way of thanks for his good wishes. Soon she made an excuse to quit the room. She did not want him to see how fast the tears were streaming down her face.

The doctor received a favourable answer to his suit. Milly only pleaded in a faint voice, with a frightened look on her face, that there might be no hurry—that time might be allowed her—because—because she so wanted her father's health to improve before she left him, if only for a day.

"Certainly, certainly," said the elated doctor. "Your will is my law," he added, gallantly; but, at the same time, he thought she need not have

seemed quite so much scared at him. Then, not a little embarrassed, at so unaccustomed a performance, he kissed her on the forehead. It was hard to say which was the more blushing and confused, the kisser or the kissed.

After this the doctor was more than ever at the captain's lodgings in Calthorpe Street. His care for his patient was unremitting. Captain Lance mended—slowly, but certainly.

The doctor's coachman treated himself to more and more smiles of a furtive sort, especially when the doctor persuaded Milly now and then to take a drive, and accompany him on a round of professional calls; she remaining in the carriage, of course, while he saw his patients, wrote prescriptions, and fingered pulses and fees. The coachman even ventured to confide to a few favoured intimates his opinion that there would, before long, be a "young missus" presiding over the establishment in Harley Street.

Dr. Dendy was very happy. Perhaps he wished, now and then, that Milly would look a little less grave; but then he consoled himself with the reflection that it was best so.

“It would be too absurd, at my time of life, to marry a romping, giggling girl. I have no right to expect from her extravagant affection. I must work for her love and earn it. In that way I shall surely gain it at last; at present it is a little too like gratitude. But time will change that—time and my own great affection for her. Dear little Milly!”

He was himself a staid, forbearing, rather stately lover. In such wise he surely recommended himself to Milly, and obtained a ready grant of all her regard and esteem. For her love he was content to wait, and labour, and hope.

Like most men of great mental activity, the doctor was always very busy with his fingers. His abundant vitality demonstrated itself in a certain restlessness of body and limb. As he talked he liked to curl up a string, or fold up a pipelight, or snip paper with a pair of scissors. He toyed with Milly's tapes and cotton, let loose her needles from their case, stuck pins into her pin-cushion in curious forms and patterns. One day as he sat by her in a playful mood (Captain Lance being

asleep in an adjoining room); he turned her work-box over bodily, strewing its contents all about the table.

He took up a carved ivory card-case, and examined it curiously.

"That was a present from Hong-Kong. Is it not beautifully cut?" Milly demanded.

There was a flush upon her cheek as she spoke. He had opened the card-case, which was deemed, perhaps, too good for use; indeed, Milly had few friends upon whom to call and leave cards, and her case contained none; but a photograph fell out.

"That is my cousin, Mark Lance. He it was who sent me the card-case. He represents a mercantile house at Hong-Kong." Her voice trembled a little as she volunteered this explanation.

"Has he been out there long?" the doctor asked quietly.

"He came home two years ago. He went out first of all quite as a boy."

"A very good-looking young fellow."

The doctor closed the card-case. He next took up a small, carefully tied-up packet.

"Those are Mark's letters," said Milly, rather breathlessly. "He generally writes about every other mail. Of late, however, he has not been so regular. I thought we should have heard from him last week; but no letter came."

The doctor looked thoughtful. Had not something like a sigh escaped her as she said that no letter had come? Did she, then, long so very much to have tidings of her cousin? He turned the letters over and over, poising them in his hand.

"I see they are addressed to you, Milly," he said. There was further inquiry in the expression of his face.

"Would you like to read them?" she asked, simply. "Mark writes very amusing letters. He gives such a capital account of his life at Hong-Kong. I think it would amuse you to read it."

"No, thank you, Milly." And he pressed her hand tenderly, as he gave her back the letters. For a moment he had doubted her; but he dismissed his doubts. Still he could not repress a feeling of

jealousy in regard to this cousin of Milly's—this Mark Lance. It was a comfort to reflect, however, that Hong-Kong was a very long way off.

In the course of a few days there was another visitor calling in Calthorpe Street. Mark Lance had arrived from Hong-Kong. He had written no letter, it appeared, because he was coming in person.

Dr. Dendy, attending his patient with customary punctuality, found the young man in the drawing-room, and recognized him at once. Only, the doctor was not especially pleased to discover the photograph hardly did Mr. Mark Lance justice. He was, in truth, far handsomer than he appeared in his *carte de visite*—a tall, broad muscular gentleman, with a sunburnt skin, bright, unflinching, blue eyes, and a very white and perfect set of teeth.

Milly seemed nervous and ill at ease, avoided her cousin's gaze, answered him monosyllabically. He had brought with him all sorts of presents for her—shawls, scarfs, fans, feathers, paintings, Oriental curiosities, and valuable knick-knackery. She hardly looked at these treasures, however; could with difficulty return her cousin common

words of thanksgiving. She was at pains to avoid conversing with him—sought excuses for quitting him. He surveyed her with surprised eyes. “Was this Milly?” he was asking himself. And he felt wronged and hurt.

Dr. Dendy cast searching glances at the cousins.

“I must go now said Mark, abruptly. “I have business at the ship’s agents in the city.”

“I suppose we shall see you again soon?” Milly asked, in faint tones, looking away from him as she spoke.

“I suppose so,” he answered carelessly.

“I’m going your way into the city—to the Ostrich Insurance Office, in Cornhill,” said Dr. Dendy to the young man. “Let me give you a lift in my brougham; you’ll find I go faster than most cabs.”

They went away together.

“I’m a madman and a fool, that’s what I am!” said Mark Lance, impetuously, as he sat in the doctor’s carriage.

“How so?”

"I can't, of course, expect you to understand or sympathize with a lover's miserable imbecilities," the young man went on. "You have never loved as I have. You don't know what love is, as I know it."

"Perhaps not—perhaps not," said the doctor, with perfect composure.

"I must speak out," cried Mark. "I must tell some one—any one—what I suffer or I shall go mad! Do you know why I came home so suddenly? Because I loved that girl; because I was sick and dying for love of her; because I couldn't bear to live longer away from her; because it seemed to me that, at all costs, I must set eyes on her again; speak to her of my love for her, whole and true and tender as it is, and entreat her to give me some portion of her love in return. I have been mastered by my love; it has possessed me—it possesses me now, absolutely. To what end? What good has come of it all? You saw how she treated me. She shrinks from, loathes, despises me. I have come home for that!"

"You have loved her long?"

"I have loved her all my life. As a child and a schoolboy I loved her—years, years ago. I used to long, while we were playing together, that some wild beast might spring upon her, so that I might destroy it, and save her or perish for her. I would have done anything for her even then. Any mad task she set me I strove to execute. I was delighted to peril life or limb in her cause. Any mischief that she did, I took the blame of, ever. I have been horsewhipped for her many a time. What did I care for the pain, so long as Milly came afterwards to comfort me and dry my tears? What suffering would not yield to a kiss from her, a smile, or a kindly word? But I am a fool to complain—I gave her my heart for a plaything. She has put it from her now with the rest of her playthings ruined and broken—quite done with. I had no right to expect she would do otherwise."

"She knew of your love?"

"How could she not know of it? Yet I was wrong, perhaps, not to speak out. I ought to have put it plainly before her. No; she does not know of my love. I have never dared to speak openly to her concerning it. I was too poor when

I came home before—or, rather, I wanted to be richer, and so in some sort worthy of her, before I spoke to her. I thought she cared for me then a little. But that is all over now. Her love for me, if she ever felt any, has quite died out of her heart now. It is hard, very hard to bear. I have toiled only for her; I am rich now. Even her father, my uncle, he is an exacting gentleman enough—but even he would own that I am now rich enough to think of marrying even his daughter. And now it seems it is too late. What have I got by my toils, my long waiting, my forbearance? Nothing. A great gulf has opened between Milly and me, I know not how or why. I have lost all hope of her. I am the most miserable fellow on this earth.”

And Mark Lance covered his face with his hands.

“I am, I know, a fool, a weak fool, to talk like this,” he said, presently recovering himself. “What must you think of me? What are my sorrows to you? What can you care for a lover’s troubles, and longings, and despair? What is my heart to

you? What can you know or care about it? Nothing, of course not; nothing."

"Nothing, of course not," the doctor echoed mechanically. "No; I know nothing of the human heart."

From the city Dr. Dendy, having parted with Mark Lance, returned to Calthorpe Street.

As he entered the drawing-room with the cautious and noiseless tread of a man well used to sick chambers and acutely sensitive patients, he heard a faint moaning sound.

Milly Lance, with tearful eyes, was reading over once again her cousin's letters—was contemplating once more the photograph contained in the ivory card-case. She started, with a half scream, as she found the doctor at her side.

"Forgive me!" she cried, in an agonized voice. "I—I am going to burn them." And then, hardly knowing what she did, she seemed to be trying to fall on her knees at the doctor's feet. He raised her up with tenderness.

"Calm yourself, Milly," he said.

She made an effort to throw the letters into the fire-place, but her courage or her strength failed her, and she burst into a passionate flood of tears.

“Have mercy,” she moaned; “have mercy.”

“You are ill, Milly,” he said, gently. “Don’t be afraid of me, my dear. I wouldn’t wrong you or pain you for the world. Calm yourself; dry your eyes. Come, that’s better. But what a pulse! Give me a sheet of note paper. I must write you a prescription at once. Mind, you must obey my instructions to the letter. He scribbled a few lines. “Read that Milly,” he said.

She glanced at the paper, expecting to find the usual unintelligible medical hieroglyphics. She started. To her amazement, she found she could understand the prescription—it was written in English, being the first and last prescription which Dr. Dendy in the whole course of his professional career had written out of the Latin tongue.

It ran something in this wise—

R. Take cousin Mark to church with you as soon as possible, and make him your husband. God bless you.

(Signed)

JOHN DENDY, M. D.

How her heart beat!

"But does he love me?"

"You know he does. And you love him. Tell him so when he comes this evening. You needn't speak; only let him read it in your eyes."

"And my father?"

"He shall give his consent. I'll take care of that."

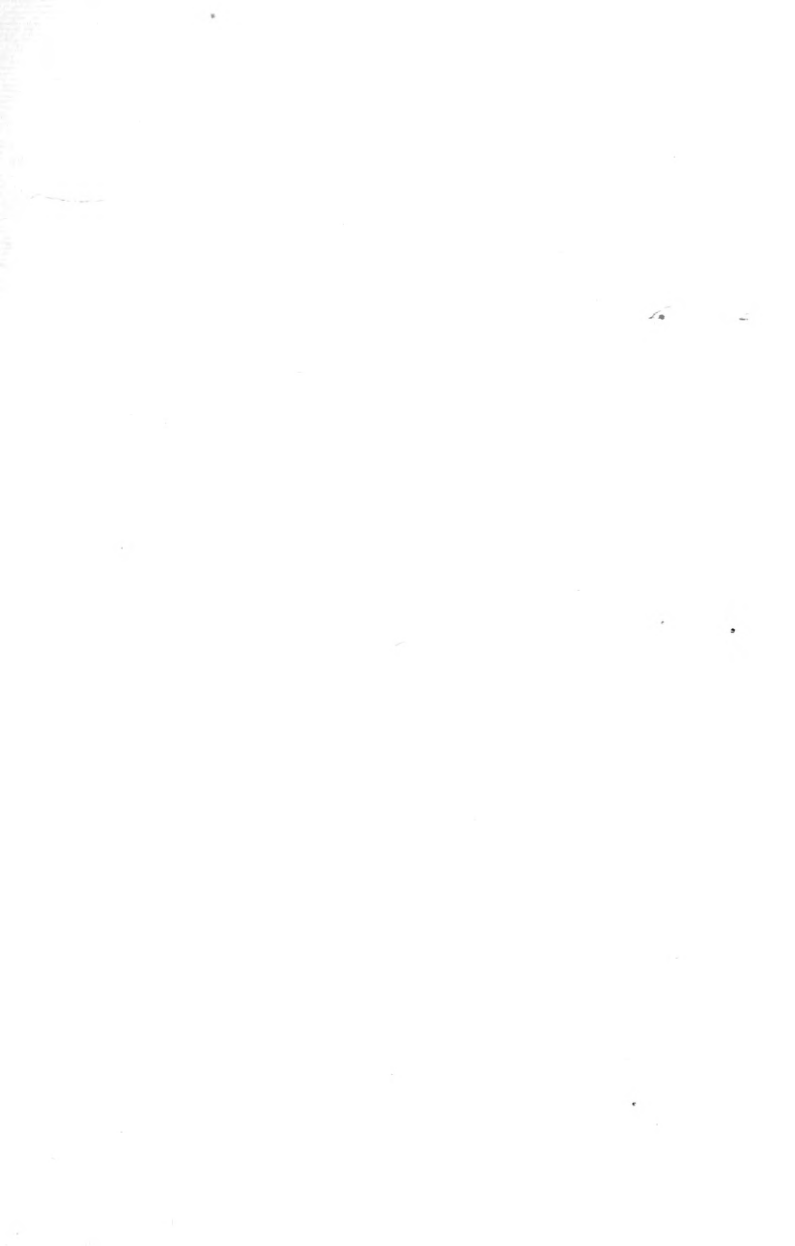
With a cry of joy, she threw herself into his arms. She could not speak her thanks, but this action of hers was sufficiently explicit. He kissed her on the forehead. She put up her lips to him; but he didn't, or wouldn't, or couldn't see what she meant.

He went away sighing, very grave in aspect, and yet lightened and comforted by the thought that he had acted rightly.

"Perhaps I shall be able to finish that book of mine now," he said, gravely. "It's time it was done. One thing—I know more about it than I did. It's but a poor, weak, troublesome organ after all, the heart. And its ache is very hard to

bear. I don't believe there's any certain cure for that in the whole range of the pharmacopæia."

Poor Dr. Dendy looked very miserable. "This won't do," he said, presently. "I must prescribe for myself. Hard work; that's my best medicine. It cures a good many complaints. At any rate it prevents the patient having time to think about them."



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